



Rt Hon Ed Balls MP
Secretary of State

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Sir Jim Rose

January 2008

Dear *Sir Jim*

I was delighted that you have agreed to lead an independent review of the primary curriculum. As the Children's Plan makes clear, this will be the most fundamental review of the primary curriculum for a decade. A strong, coherent curriculum which has flexibility to personalise teaching and learning is crucial to driving up standards further. It is central to achieving the ambitions we have set out in the Children's Plan and to delivering the outcomes of the Every Child Matters Agenda.

Nothing is more important than the body of essential knowledge, skills and understanding we choose as a nation to pass on to our young people. The primary curriculum must ensure that all pupils can build on their prior learning in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) to develop the essential reading, writing, numeracy and personal skills they need in order to learn and develop. It must provide all pupils with a broad and balanced entitlement to learning which encourages creativity and inspires in them a commitment to learning that will last a lifetime. The primary curriculum should also facilitate a smooth transition for young people from primary to secondary school.

While most primary schools are providing their pupils with an inspiring and engaging curriculum, some tell us that the number of subjects and the amount of prescription in some of the current programmes of study restricts their flexibility. This can particularly affect those pupils who are struggling to keep up or those who require more challenging tasks.

Building on the steady rise in primary school results in recent years, I would like your review of the primary curriculum to enable schools to have even greater flexibility to meet pupils' individual needs and strengths, including those with special educational needs, in order to further help them narrow the attainment gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers. The content of existing programmes of study should be reviewed, reducing prescription where possible. A key objective of your review is to enable schools to strengthen their focus on raising standards in reading, writing and numeracy.

department for
children, schools and families



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

I also want pupils to be introduced to a broad range of subjects in primary school, including languages. In March 2007 my predecessor accepted Lord Dearing's recommendation that we should make languages a compulsory subject at Key Stage 2 the next time we review the primary curriculum. I would therefore like your review to provide me with advice on how best to introduce this. It is important that the introduction to a broad range of subjects, including languages, should be manageable for schools and provide a coherent and progressive learning experience for pupils.

Alongside essential knowledge, skills and understanding, personal development should be a central aspect of the primary curriculum. One of the messages from the *Time to Talk* consultation was that we should be concerned with development of the whole child as well as their level of attainment. Personal, social and emotional capabilities are closely related to educational attainment, success in the labour market and to children's wellbeing. Your review of the primary curriculum should consider how to develop a more integrated and simpler framework for the personal skills which all pupils should develop through their schooling. As you take this area of work forward we will want to ensure that it is consistent with our separate work to consider how we might provide a record of children's progress as they move through primary education and beyond.

Getting the content of the National Curriculum right presents difficult choices and balances. Your review should consider when and how in primary education children should be introduced to the key ideas and practice of the other principal subject areas of learning – the creative arts; the humanities; PE and sport – as a preparation for further learning at the secondary stage. Your review should examine whether pupils should continue to be introduced to each existing National Curriculum subject from Year 1. I would welcome your advice on whether, in order to provide greater continuity from the EYFS, pupils' interests might be better served by studying fewer subjects during primary education, particularly in Key Stage 1. You will also want to consider whether some aspects of the EYFS should be extended into the primary curriculum. This might include, for example, placing emphasis on the full range of areas of learning and development contained in the EYFS, including social and emotional areas of development, and widening the curriculum opportunities for child initiated and play-based activity.

Transition from EYFS to primary school can be difficult for some children. As part of supporting this transition, you may want to consider how the curriculum can support better use of information from their feeder early years settings and reception classes so that they understand their new pupils better and personalise their learning accordingly.

Entry to primary school can be problematic for summer-born children. For example, summer-born children are up to a year younger than their classmates when they sit tests at the end of each Key Stage. This can affect their performance right through school age up to the age of 16. I would like your review to give particular consideration to how we can design the

curriculum to improve outcomes for summer-born children. In the Children's Plan consultation some parents indicated that they would like greater flexibility over when their children can start primary school – for example having the choice to start in September, January or a whole year later. The latest children in England can start primary school is at the beginning of the term immediately after their fifth birthday and we do not plan to change this. But given the concerns expressed to us by parents I would like you to consider whether it would be appropriate to allow more choice and flexibility in start dates for children entering primary school.

The transition from primary to secondary education can also be a difficult one for some pupils, and I would like you to consider how reform of the primary curriculum might help to smooth this transition. Your review should build on developments in the new secondary curriculum and examine what information should be passed between primary and secondary schools. You will also want to discuss with Ofsted ways in which the accountability framework might be used to encourage both primary schools and secondary schools to renew their efforts in this area.

Your review is focused on the curriculum and is not considering changes to the current assessment and testing regime. However, as your review of the primary curriculum progresses you will need to take account of the Making Good Progress work and the development of Single Level Tests.

I should be grateful if could provide advice by 15 February on the prioritisation, sequencing and timescales of the work in this letter. I would like you to provide me with an interim report on your review by 31 October 2008 followed by final advice and revised programmes of study at the end of March 2009.

Throughout your review you will be closely supported by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) who will take the leading role in providing the evidence required for the review and who will manage the associated consultations. The QCA are also helping to staff your review secretariat alongside my officials.

I should be grateful if you could provide me, Jim Knight and Beverley Hughes with regular updates as your review progresses.

I am copying this letter to Sir Anthony Greener and Ken Boston.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'ED BALLS', written in a cursive style.

ED BALLS MP